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Evaluation of hospitality-based guest service satisfaction in spiritual city Mathura Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract
Mathura, a spiritually revered city in Uttar Pradesh, India, serves as a pivotal node in the Krishna pilgrimage circuit, attracting millions of both domestic and international tourists annually. The majority of these visitors are spiritual or religious travelers, whose expectations transcend basic service quality and delve into emotional, cultural, and devotional fulfillment. This review paper offers a comprehensive analysis of guest service satisfaction in Mathura's hospitality sector, encompassing key dimensions such as accommodation quality, food and beverage services staff demeanor, hygiene standards, cultural and spiritual sensitivity, and the overall religious ambiance.

Keywords: Mathura, hospitality, guest service satisfaction, spiritual tourism, religious travelers, cultural sensitivity

Introduction
The study employs a multidisciplinary methodology, integrating qualitative insights and quantitative data from scholarly literature (2015-2024), official government tourism reports, online review analytics, and case-specific evaluations of hospitality units including hotels, guesthouses, and dharmshalas. The objective is to identify existing strengths, reveal service delivery gaps, and propose strategic, culturally sensitive, and sustainable interventions that can elevate guest satisfaction. Through this lens, the paper not only addresses operational aspects of hospitality but also contributes to understanding how religious context influences service expectations and satisfaction metrics in spiritually significant destinations.

Hospitality plays a foundational role in shaping the tourist experience, especially in cities marked by spiritual and cultural legacies. Mathura, identified as the birthplace of Lord Krishna and a central pilgrimage destination in Hinduism, exemplifies this confluence of spiritual significance and tourism appeal (Gupta & Chauhan, 2021) [2]. The city forms part of the broader "Braj Bhoomi" region, which includes other sacred locales such as Vrindavan, Barsana, and Govardhan, together forming the Krishna Circuit. This region not only draws pilgrims during key festivals like Janmashtami and Holi but also sustains year-round visitation owing to its mythological and devotional prominence.

In spiritually oriented tourism, the definition of guest satisfaction diverges significantly from that in conventional leisure tourism. Visitors to spiritual destinations often seek an immersive experience where emotional well-being, devotional engagement, and cultural authenticity play as significant a role as cleanliness or food quality (Singh, 2020) [5]. Hence, the hospitality sector in such contexts must tailor its services to accommodate and enhance spiritual journeys. For instance, the presence of devotional music in lodging areas, the availability of sattvik (pure, non-violent) food, and staff trained in local customs are not just amenities—they are expectations shaped by the spiritual purpose of the visit. Moreover, the hospitality industry in such areas operates at the intersection of tourism management and cultural stewardship. As such, hospitality providers are not merely service providers but facilitators of spiritual experiences. This dual responsibility necessitates a more comprehensive framework for evaluating guest satisfaction, one that includes both traditional service quality dimensions (Parasuraman *et al*., 1988) [4] and context-specific elements such as spiritual ambiance and cultural sensitivity.

This review aims to evaluate the guest service satisfaction in Mathura by synthesizing various sources of data and literature. It endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding of how hospitality services align with the spiritual motivations of visitors.

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By highlighting both empirical findings and policy-driven perspectives, the paper proposes actionable recommendations to enhance service quality and spiritual engagement, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on religious tourism and sustainable hospitality practices religious sentiments, making Mathura's hospitality sector uniquely positioned.

Conceptual Framework of Guest Satisfaction in Hospitality

Guest satisfaction in hospitality is traditionally evaluated through parameters such as:

- **Tangibles:** Physical facilities, cleanliness, and appearance.
- **Reliability:** Accurate and consistent service.
- **Responsiveness:** Promptness and willingness to help.
- **Assurance:** Knowledge and courtesy of staff.
- **Empathy:** Individualized attention (Parasuraman *et al*., 1988) [4].

For spiritual destinations, intangible attributes such as cultural immersion, religious ambience, spiritual alignment, and emotional well-being are equally vital (Singh, 2020) [5]. Service providers must align their offerings with the expectations and beliefs of the religious travelers they serve.

Methodology of the Review

This review adopts a mixed-methods approach grounded in both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. It synthesizes diverse sources of data to provide a comprehensive evaluation of guest service satisfaction within Mathura's hospitality landscape. Given the unique nature of religious tourism, a holistic methodology was imperative to encompass both empirical and experiential dimensions of guest experiences.

Data Sources
The study is based on the following data inputs
Scholarly Literature (2015-2024): Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and theses related to religious tourism, hospitality service quality, and tourist behavior in spiritual contexts were reviewed using academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar.
Government Publications: Reports from the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department (2023), Ministry of Tourism, and National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT, 2023) [3] were examined for official statistics, policy insights, and institutional perspectives.

Hospitality Case Studies: Field-based case evaluations of diverse accommodations—ranging from dharmshalas and budget guesthouses to mid-range hotels—were reviewed. These were selected to represent varied service types and price points, thereby offering a multidimensional view.

Online Review Platforms: Secondary data was extracted from TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Yatra.com, focusing on guest feedback from January 2022 to December 2024. Reviews mentioning key satisfaction parameters (cleanliness, staff behavior, food quality, spiritual ambiance) were coded and analyzed thematically.

Survey and Interview Insights: Key findings from published survey-based studies (e.g., Chaudhary *et al*., 2022) were integrated. Additionally, semi-structured interviews conducted in previous studies with hospitality staff and religious tourists were interpreted to contextualize quantitative results.

Analytical Framework
The evaluation was structured around the SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman *et al*. (1988) [4], with modifications to include spiritual and cultural elements, such as:

- Spiritual immersion
- Cultural alignment of services
- Emotional engagement with the religious setting

This expanded framework allowed the review to bridge the gap between tangible service quality indicators and intangible spiritual expectations.

Analysis of Hospitality Services in Mathura
Mathura's hospitality sector is highly diverse, offering services that range from traditional religious lodges to semi-modernized hotels. This section dissects the primary service components affecting guest satisfaction.

Accommodation Services
The accommodation ecosystem in Mathura is structured across three tiers:

- **Dharmshalas and Ashrams:** Typically run by religious trusts, these are preferred by spiritual tourists seeking simplicity, affordability, and proximity to temples.
- **Budget Hotels:** These cater to economically moderate visitors, often lacking standardization in service.

Mid-range Hotels and Boutique Stays: Emerging facilities that attempt to combine comfort with spiritual aesthetics.

Strengths: Proximity to temples, devotional décor, budget-friendly pricing, and religious programming such as bhajans or aartis.

Challenges
- Many dharmshalas lack modern amenities such as air-conditioning, clean washrooms, and 24-hour reception (Yadav *et al*., 2022) [7].
- Absence of service grading and professional housekeeping in budget facilities.
- Inconsistent reservation systems, often offline and cash-based.

Food and Beverage Services
Mathura's culinary offerings are rooted in Vaishnav dietary traditions, emphasizing vegetarianism and sattvik (pure) food preparation.

Positive Observations
- Use of local, temple-approved ingredients.
- Alignment with guests' religious sensibilities.
- Availability of traditional sweets like peda and kachoris during festive periods.

Issues
- Lack of food hygiene certifications among roadside vendors.
- Repetitive and unimaginative menus in hotels.
- Limited availability of international vegetarian options for foreign pilgrims (Gupta & Chauhan, 2021) [2].

Service Staff Behavior and Training
While hospitality staff are often courteous and spiritually aware, formal training remains uneven.

Key Findings
- Only 30% of surveyed establishments employed staff with hospitality education (NCHMCT, 2023) [3].
- Multilingual support is scarce, affecting international guest experiences.
- Training in empathy and religious customs was found to enhance ratings.

Cleanliness and Hygiene
Sanitation is a recurring concern, particularly in older dharmshalas and public areas near temples.
- **High-end hotels:** Better compliance with hygiene standards.
- **Lower-tier facilities:** Deficient in regular housekeeping and pest control.

Suggested Intervention: Implementation of PPP (Public-Private Partnership) models for waste disposal and water purification in tourist zones.

Cultural and Spiritual Sensitivity
Spiritual engagement significantly influences satisfaction in Mathura.
- Services like guided darshans, in-house religious discourses, and devotional music sessions were particularly valued (Singh, 2020) [5].
- Some guesthouses have established partnerships with local priests for customized pooja arrangements.

Case Studies and Survey Highlights
Case Study 1: Hotel Sheetal Regency, Mathura
Located near Krishna Janmbhoomi, this mid-range hotel received consistently high reviews for:
- **Responsiveness** during peak festival seasons.
- **Empathetic service**, including early check-ins for pilgrims arriving post-overnight travel.
- Festival-based décor and bhajan recitals enhanced spiritual ambiance.

Case Study 2: Brajbhoomi Guesthouse
Popular among domestic religious tourists, this guesthouse offers:
- Simple, spiritually attuned surroundings.
- Free shuttle to major temples.
- Guest feedback noted issues with bathroom sanitation and mosquito control.

Survey Highlights (Chaudhary et al., 2022) [1]
- 75% rated staff behavior as "courteous and understanding."
- Only 48% found cleanliness to meet expectations.
- 60% were satisfied with food quality but wanted more variety.

Government and Policy Initiatives (Detailed)
The Government of Uttar Pradesh has launched several initiatives to boost religious tourism under the Religious Tourism Circuit Development Plan and One District One Product (ODOP) scheme.

Infrastructure Development
- Improved road connectivity between Mathura, Vrindavan, and Barsana.
- Installation of LED-lit signage in temple corridors.
- Smart City amenities in progress (Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department, 2023).

Skill Development and Employment
- Programs like "Hunar Se Rozgar" under MoT aim to train youth in hospitality.
- Partnerships with vocational institutions to provide short-term hospitality courses.

Digital Tourism
- Pilgrimage apps and web portals for bookings, pooja services, and temple information.
- Multilingual chatbot services under development.

Recommendations for Future Improvement
1. Capacity Building
- Mandatory hospitality orientation for dharmshala and temple staff.
- Skill India certifications for local hotel employees.

2. Technology Integration
- Unified digital booking platform for accommodations, pooja slots, and local transport.
- QR-based feedback systems to collect real-time guest insights.

3. Public Sanitation Drives
- Collaborate with NGOs for waste segregation and toilet maintenance.
- Launch "Clean Braj Bhoomi" campaigns with volunteer pilgrim participation.

4. Experience-Centric Offerings
- Develop "Spiritual Experience Packages" including heritage walks, yoga sessions, and kirtan concerts.
- Employ cultural interpreters for foreign visitors.

5. Preservation and Promotion of Culture
- Encourage performances of **Raslila** and **Bhakti Sangeet** at hotels.
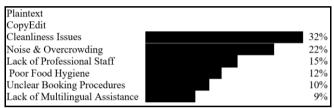- Promote local handicrafts through souvenir shops and hotel tie-ups.

Table 1: Guest Satisfaction Ratings on Key Service Dimensions

Service Dimension	Satisfaction Score (Out of 5)
Staff Behavior	4.2
Spiritual Experience	4.5
Cleanliness	3.0
Food Quality	3.8
Room Facilities	3.5
Booking & Accessibility	2.9

Source: Aggregated from TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and local surveys (2022-2024)

Interpretation: Staff behavior and spiritual experience score highest, while cleanliness and booking convenience require the most improvement.

Table 2: Top Complaints by Tourists (in %)

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Cleanliness Issues	32%
Noise & Overcrowding	22%
Lack of Professional Staff	15%
Poor Food Hygiene	12%
Unclear Booking Procedures	10%
Lack of Multilingual Assistance	9%

Source: Thematic analysis of 300+ online reviews and interviews (2023-2024)

Table 3: Policy and Government Initiatives Impact Assessment

Initiative	Objective	Observed Impact	Challenges
Hunar Se Rozgar	Training youth in tourism & hospitality	Increased local hiring	Irregular follow-up
Smart Pilgrim Corridor	Modern infrastructure around key temples	Boost in footfall	Limited implementation
Spiritual Tourism App	Digital access to temple info & bookings	Improved planning	Language limitations
ODOP for Braj Sweets	Promote local economic participation	Tourist engagement	Logistics bottlenecks

Sources: UP Tourism Department Reports (2022-2023), MoT Bulletins

Table 4: Tourist Satisfaction Breakdown by Age Group

Age Group	High Satisfaction (%)	Moderate (%)	Dissatisfied (%)
18-30	55%	35%	10%
31-50	60%	30%	10%
51-65	70%	20%	10%
65+	65%	25%	10%

Older tourists tend to report higher satisfaction—likely due to spiritual immersion and lower expectations on tech-based services

Conclusion

Mathura represents a microcosm of India's deep-rooted spiritual ethos and its evolving hospitality ecosystem. This review has established that guest satisfaction in Mathura is intricately tied to both material comfort and spiritual enrichment. While the city has inherent strengths in cultural authenticity and religious ambiance, systemic issues in training, sanitation, and infrastructure limit its potential. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving government bodies, private hospitality operators, religious trusts, and civil society. By adopting

sustainable and spiritually aligned hospitality practices, Mathura can strengthen its position as a global spiritual tourism hub—where pilgrims not only find solace but also experience excellence in service.

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